NEW TRAINING METHODS TO BE STUDIED

For several years Government and private organizations have been working on new methods to make learning and teaching easier. The leader within the Government in one of the most promising techniques--programmed instruction or programmed learning as it is sometimes called--has been the Air Force. As a result of its experience, the Air Force claims that in comparison with conventional training methods this system has reduced training time by 33 percent while gaining 9 percent in achievement. Similar improvements have been claimed by industry and many schools.

Learning From Programmed Instruction

In programmed learning the student works at his own speed, using material which requires him to study the information presented and then react to it before receiving more information. Programmed instruction proceeds in small, logical steps, requires an active response at each step, and gives immediate knowledge of results.

At first it was believed that programmed learning was suitable for teaching only factual material, but it is now being used to teach concepts as well. Teaching machines were widely used when programmed learning was first started, but studies have shown since then that teaching machines do not add materially to the learning when compared with a book-type presentation. Machines such as tape recorders are used, however, in teaching foreign languages by programmed methods; and electronic computers are also being used in some programmed courses.

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Programmed instruction does not eliminate the need for an instructor, but is does free some of his time for instruction which cannot be programmed. It also permits an increase in the size of classes.

Application To Organization Training

Although the Organization has had experience with programmed instruction since 1958 and has developed nineteen separate programs on a wide variety of subjects, until recently no attempt had been made to evaluate its general applicability to Organization needs. In January of this year a plan was approved for a comprehensive survey of new learning systems, including programmed learning. The first phase is comprised of a thorough investigation of the present state-of-the-art in programmed instruction and a concurrent evaluation of programmed materials now being used in the Organization. The second phase contemplates the design and initiation of an experimental program within the Organization and its evaluation in comparison with our existing training system. An Instructional Systems Study Group, with the former Director of Training as coordinator, has been established to carry out the plan. The Study Group is presently evaluating "off-the-shelf" programs which appear to have Organization relevance. It also plans to contract with firms to develop programs and provide guidance in development of an "in-house" capability to produce programs specifically designed to meet Organization requirements.

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A "Guinea Pig" Project

Under the new foreign language policy every professional employee will be expected to possess at the time he arrives at his overseas post, or to acquire within six months, at least a "courtesy" level or proficiency in the official language of his post or in a commonly used alternate language. In addition, nonprofessional employees and wives of employees serving abroad will be encouraged to acquire "courtesy" levels of proficiency. In view of the new policy, the Instructional Systems Study Group has devised a "guinea pig" project. Claims have been made by a private concern for its self-study language program that appear very promising but have not been objectively validated. Consequently, to determine the relevancy of the new programmed materials to the new Organization language requirements, volunteers have been requested to assist in a test of two programs. One program will consist of one hour a day programmed instruction in ████ or Spanish, five days a week for approximately twenty weeks. The other program in the same languages will be conducted full-time for approximately five weeks. Hopefully, these tests will show that programmed materials of the type used in the experiment can be used to satisfy many of our current language training requirements, especially at the "courtesy" level.

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